

**PAL-PIN Project  
1996-97**

**"How To Recruit Students  
in a Rural Area"**

*by  
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## INTRODUCTION

My inquiry question is "How to Recruit Students in a Rural Area." In this paper I will discuss the background of our literacy council and why I chose this question. I will summarize and analyze the data I collected and offer ways to implement the findings. I believe the main thing we need to consider is awareness of our programs. I have lived in this area for 15 years and until June of 1996, I did not know a literacy program existed in Susquehanna County or even what a literacy council did. Some one called to tell me they heard of a job opening I might be interested in. I'm sure there a lot of other people, literate and illiterate, who are not aware of our programs. It is imperative that we get the word out!

## BACKGROUND

Our literacy council is a small two-room office located in the middle of Montrose. We have two employees: the executive director and myself, the project coordinator. Our office hours are from 9:00 a.m. to 3 p.m. with an hour off for lunch.

We have served 68 students over the past year. Of those students, 28 were from the jail. Our tutors are all volunteers. They meet with their student an hour a week at a local establishment such as a church or a library.

I have been employed with the Council for almost a year now and have learned a great deal of the need for the services offered. After attending some state-wide conferences I was astonished by the hundreds of students that other councils service. I know they have these numbers in part because of the size of their community and their accessibility.

In Susquehanna County there is a population of 40,380 (according to the 1990 census). The county covers 830 square miles. In Montrose, the

county seat of Susquehanna, and where our office is located, the population is only 2100, of which one fourth of those are under age 18. That means that only 4% of the population that we serve live within a few miles of our office.

According to welfare studies, school studies, and the 1990 census, 0.7% of the residents have below a fifth grade education; 7.2% have below a ninth grade level and 24.4% do not have a high school diploma. This 32.3% are the people that we need to focus on but they are so spread out that we must come up with more recruiting techniques. That is why I feel my inquiry question is so important. If I can research and analyze data on student recruitment I think we will be able to serve the community in the way that was originally intended. It is my hope that when this research is completed, I will have discovered what has worked in the past and discover new ways of recruiting students in the future.

### MY MOTIVATION

What also motivated me to delve into this question is the fact that, as I mentioned, people are not aware of our existence. When I tell people where I work they look at me in confusion. I get responses such as, "What's that?" "Where is it?" "What do you actually do?" "Do people really need that stuff?"

I was further motivated by seeing how our services affect our students. My student started because she wants to be able to read to her children who are approaching school age. She said she also wants to show her ex-husband that she is not stupid. She has only missed two classes in six months. She is always eager to begin. Over time I have seen her self-confidence grow as she's learning to read. I've heard other success stories about people who have improved their lives by getting jobs, promotions, continuing education, increasing their self-esteem and their confidence. I want this feeling of

success and self worth to be something that is "contagious". The more effectively we can get the word out, the sooner we will be able to help accomplish this goal.

## DATA COLLECTION

### STUDENT RECORDS:

I began data collection by reviewing intake forms from current and past students (Appendix A). I looked for reasons why students wanted to utilize our services and how they heard about our program. The data from prior years is not as complete as it should be. I found that many folders did not have intake pages completely filled in.

### WHY STUDENTS CAME TO US:

When reviewing the reason why students initially came to our program we see that in prior years as well as in the current year the main reason is personal issues: They want to be able to read, write and learn basic skills which they believe will improve their life and gain them social acceptance. Another reason is they want to get their GED.

I think this shows us that in our advertising we should focus on being able to help people earn their GED and also the personal rewards that come with the ability to read. For instance we could stress the joy you feel when you can read a book to your children or grandchildren or the amount of information you can find out from reading the newspaper.

While we want to emphasize what students are interested in, we don't want to forget the numerous other areas we can help people in such as helping them with work situations (being able to fill out applications, write resumes, read manuals), get a drivers license or CDL, etc.

## HOW STUDENTS HEARD ABOUT US:

In analyzing Appendix A "How did you find out about our program?" we find that the majority of students have found us. Such sources are community agencies, friends, relatives, school, self motivation, courts, and libraries. Only 24% of current and previous students we're recruited as a direct effort on the part of the council through methods such as newspaper, TV, posters, and handouts. I think our strongest method is "word of mouth" advertising.

## STUDENT SURVEY:

I decided the best way to find out about students was to ask the students. So I sent them a survey (Appendix B).

I mailed the Student Questionnaire to the eight active students and gave two of them to the tutor to go over with the student. I received five back. The students indicated that they heard about our programs through the welfare office, community agencies, and through a friend. The motivating factor for two of the students was because they wanted to learn to read, two to get their GED, and the fifth said his Mom was a motivating factor. Their goals through our program for two of them are to become better readers and three want to pass the GED. The students stated that if they stopped participating in our programs it would probably be a result of a heavy work-load, illness, tragedy, or having completed their goal of learning to read. One said that she would not let herself stop the program. None of them knew of any other people who could use our services. Under comments two of the students said how wonderful their tutors are.

## **TUTOR/VOLUNTEER SURVEY:**

I believe that since people who work with students are aware of their problems and may have had experiences they can share with us, so I sent out a survey to our tutors and volunteers (Appendix C).

I mailed approximately 70 Tutor and Volunteer Questionnaires. I received 11. The following are the results:

**Do you know anyone who could use our services:** 8 no, 3 yes

Two of the yes's said the person doesn't think it is important to read.

**What do you think are the reasons people do not come to our office?**

- lack of desire, lack of purpose
- pride
- can't commit to acknowledging the problem; can't see the need to make the change/improvement in reading ability; privacy concerns
- afraid to take the first step, and following through is hard
- transportation, no phones
- embarrassment; inconvenience to their schedule.
- two said people may not be aware of office
- don't realize the importance
- they are getting along without it
- they don't think they have a problem

**Do you have any suggestions on how to get our message out to the public?**

- Pennysaver with a picture-graphic message and run the ad every week
- let former non-reader "come out of the closet"; go public via literature and airwaves
- channel 19 spots; advertising, personal testimonials
- article in local papers stating some statistics would be helpful.
- you are getting the message out
- more articles in newspapers
- more activities like Apple Festival
- through the school systems
- speaking to church groups

- brochure that lists the services we offer
- personal contacts
- TV ad

**Thoughts or comments:**

- If people don't feel a need to read why would they seek you out? None of us like to show our weakest side to others.
- Meet with employment and training staff at welfare office and Trehab.

Close

contact will be best reminder of your services.

- I feel strongly that the setting in which the student and tutor are involved is very important. Continuity of course is so important. I would like a student in my own town or close by so that travel never becomes an object.
- Enjoyed the time spent with my many students
- I don't know if they have tried group classes or working in the school system with problem readers.
- My input comes from my own personal experience working at Lackawanna Junior College, in a Reading/Writing Lab. There are many students eligible to receive the services, who need the help, but they fail to seek out the help. After conducting research college-wide, I discovered two things: First - not many of the students I targeted were aware the services existed, or who I was. Secondly, students did not understand what the lab had to offer. I completed a mailing, drafted a memo to all faculty, and posted an advertisement featuring the lab. My mailing list contained 25 names, of those, 6 made appointments with me. All of these students were unaware of the services, or who I was. We, as an institution had very little money to spare, and this effort cost the school only postage.
- Try to help people to learn to read at an earlier age.

## DATA ANALYSIS

### NON-COMMITTMENT:

When looking at "What do you think are the reasons people do not come to our office?" we see a lot has to do with people's feelings about illiteracy. Many think it is not important for them to learn to read, they don't have enough time, or that it is too late in life for them to start. Others don't want to admit they have a problem with reading. Here are grown adults who cannot do something that most eight year olds can do. It must be a blow to their ego.

### EMOTIONAL BARRIERS:

In analyzing all the data I see numerous things that can cause emotional barriers for students either before they start or after they have begun. These barriers range from a lack of desire to too much pride. There is also the issue of privacy and confidentiality. They are afraid to take the first step or are too embarrassment to admit they have a problem.

### TANGIBLE BARRIERS:

We find that other students don't come to our program because they don't have a phone to call us, they don't have a car, so they can't come to us, they don't have a babysitter. Some people may have these things, but don't have the money to make use of them.

We also need to try to deal with tangible barriers. One student couldn't come in because he had to wait until his SSI check came in the mail so he would have gas money. Another student couldn't call her tutor because she doesn't have long-distance. There are a lot of parents who don't come to classes because of lack of child care.



We can try to help them overcome personal barriers. While we can't solve people's problems and make them want to come we can try to provide services that we know are common problems. One idea we are going to check on is to see if the kids from the baby-sitting classes at the high school would like to gain experience by watching the GED students children in one room, while the parents are learning in another room.

We have put such an emphasis on "confidentiality" that it seems like a "bad word". We shouldn't make people feel like they need to hide the fact that they need help in certain areas. Confidentiality is provided to students. However we shouldn't make an issue of it so the student doesn't feel it is something to be ashamed of. We should try to take the negative out of "confidentiality". Maybe call it "adult learning center" instead of "literacy council".

#### GETTING THE WORD OUT:

The tutors and volunteers had very good suggestions on how we should get the word out. Many of them we have tried in the past, but not presently. Maybe with the right man-power we can do all these things at once!

## SOLUTIONS

As a result of this survey I suggest we talk to employers at community agencies and let them know what services we can offer their clients/customers and leave brochures at places such as: human services agencies and other organizations in the community such as the welfare office, unemployment office, children and youth, food banks, and parent-child centers. Other places we could leave brochures would include thrift shops, chamber of commerce, bowling alleys, granges, laundromats, jury register, voter registration, and fire companies. We need to be sure we do this all over the county, not just in our immediate town of Montrose.

Because of the inability to read, I believe one of the most effective ways of advertising would be to have our announcement on the public access TV and on local radio (as long as the cost were low, or were donated to us). However, our local access TV station writes all their announcements. So, again, unless someone tells the nonreader, this tactic will not be of benefit.

We have joined the Chamber of Commerce in order to network with others. If each chamber member is aware of our services, they can put up our sign in their office/store, have brochures on hand, and mention our services to anyone they think could benefit from us. In addition, we could have organizations mention us in their newsletters.

During summer months when there are so many fairs going on, we should have a booth set up so we can talk to people first hand. There are also other community events where we could do the same.

We are going to continue with our Annual Literacy Apple Festival. This September will be our third year. We feel that it is important to have an annual event in order to continually keep literacy in people's mind. It also raises community support and awareness.

Another important point is that we need to make adults aware of benefits of being able to help their children, and being a positive role model for them. Some adults need a reason to change their life. A lot of adults think it is too late for them, they've gone this far why bother learning now. We need to let people know they have a second chance.

In the GED ads let them know that it is not the same setting as in school. They are treated as adults. They get coffee breaks and are in an informal atmosphere where they are not competing with others.

Because of the rural nature of our community, it would be helpful to establish satellite sites at schools, churches, or borough buildings. That would take a lot of time to work out the details. Such questions would be raised: who would run it - a volunteer or paid staff. Would we be able to find someone to donate a space, if so for how long or would we have to pay for space. Advertising cost to let people know we're there would be incurred.

We all know how busy we are at work each day, and we don't know how we are going to fit everything in, let alone start new things. I feel that we are letting our most valuable asset go to waste - our Volunteers! If we can schedule a monthly volunteer meeting group we could discuss their ideas, decide what to work on next, and prepare them for the work needed. We should train tutors or volunteers to give speeches at different functions. They could be delivering brochures to businesses and talking to the owners. They could help man satellite offices. Volunteers are people who are willing to help, we should let them.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I feel it is in the council's best interest to set aside time to look at this issue of student recruitment and discuss our best course of action. Of course this will have to be scheduled in-between monthly time-sheets being filled out, placing students, completing year-end-reports, taxes, payroll, bills, making Apple Festival preparations, running workshops, writing and distributing the newsletter, and attending board meetings.

## Appendix A

How Did You Find Out About Our Program?		
	Previous Students	Current Students
Community Agency *	33	8
Friend/Relative	16	5
Newspaper	8	1
TV	4	
School	3	4
Posters	3	1
Self	2	
GED Teacher	1	
Reverend	1	
Court		3
Library		2
Handouts/brochures		2
Former Student		1
total	71	27
*community agency includes Trehab, SPOC, Child Welfare, JTPA, Food Bank, Step-by-Step		
Major Reason For Participating in Program		
GED	12	12
Read & Write	5	9
Read Bible	1	
Improve Basic Skills	3	
ESL	6	
Better Job	4	3
CDL	2	
Improve Life	1	
Improve at Job	2	
Improve at School	3	
To Attend School		1
Military	1	2
Drivers License		3
Social Acceptance		3
Read to Kids		2
total	40	35

Data From Student Intake Packages

## **STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

1. How did you hear about the literacy program?
2. What motivated you to sign up for literacy tutoring?
3. What is your major literacy goal?
4. If you decide not to continue, what do you think will be the reason?
5. Do you know anyone who could use our services?  
If yes, how many?
6. If you were to tell them about us, do you think they would come?

If no, why not?

Additional Comments:

April 17, 1997

Dear Tutors and Volunteers:

I am participating in a state wide literacy inquiry project. The issue I am concerned with is the recruitment of students in a rural area. I know that there are more people in Susquehanna County that could use our help. The problem we face is how to let them know we are here and to motivate them to take the first step, by calling us or coming to the office. Please take a moment to answer the questions below. Your input will be greatly appreciated. Thanks for your help!

Lynnette Sena  
Project Coordinator

Do you know anyone who could use our service? YES NO  
If yes, have you told them about us and did they call us?

What do you think are the reasons people do not come to our office?  
(examples: they don't want anyone to know they cannot read, they  
don't have transportation, etc.)

Do you have any suggestions on how to get our message out to the public?

Thoughts or comments: